Unpacking History, Unpacking Corruption, Unpacking Media Analysis. Some Recent books on the South African Media

ABSTRACT

This extended review essay maps recent titles written by practicing journalists and journalists turned academics. The analysis focuses on the *Race Talk* (Botma), *Media Freedom* (Rabe), *News in the Age of Social Media* (Daniels), and *Behind the Headlines* (Harber). These studies follow earlier analyses, *Geopolitics and Power* (Wasserman) and *Media in Postapartheid South Africa* (Jacobs). An intersecting track are the exposés written by journalists like Dasnois and Whitfield (*Paper Tiger*), Harmse (on SABC), Krige (*SABC 8*), and Sundaram (*Gupta TV*). How each frames history, researcher position and the respective writing styles are discussed. My argument is that academic studies should be read in concert with works written by journalists because abstract frames of reference tend to bracket out the daily nitty gritty struggles within newsrooms, especially within the current conjecture. The conclusion suggests that whatever the alleged flaws of the 'mainstream media' (Radebe), is that individual journalists (and others) are the ones telling the story behind the story in the slew of books that have been recently published on state and private sector corruption.

Key words: History, South Africa, media studies, journalism, resistance, state capture

Introducing an anthology on Media and Empire in the 20th Century, Ruth Teer-Tomaselli (2014: 875) observes that the media are primarily seen by social scientists as source material rather than as media per se. Writing media history, or media in history, or history in media, is the focus of this essay, as narrated by a number of contemporary authors. The telling of national history, however, in recent times has become a shallow synchronic populist monologue that suppresses the mess, contradictions and contestations of the past, how these have informed the present, and how they will play out in the future. The books cited here, however, provide detail, texture and evidence. In this interacting relationship, practicing journalists are the ying and academics are the yang, but the ying rarely are set for classroom use.

Massive shifts in the ownership and control of the South African media since the mid-1990s were accompanied by extraordinary upheavals in newsroom practices. Yet, the myth of blanket white-held ownership continues even as mergers, buyouts and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) deals have been frequent and continuing. The early transitional changes were followed by firms like Naspers/Media24 and MultiChoice, which, on entering African and global markets, escaped their previous ethnic, political and ideological emphases (Teer-Tomaselli *et al* 2019; Olorunnisola and Tomaselli 2011). Rogue elements within other firms across all sectors of the economy from the mid-2000s literally infiltrated local companies to impose compliance with corrupt factions of the new ruling party via a process known as 'state capture'. Many politicians and their minions operated as a thieving comprador bourgeoisie in concert with an Indian expatriate family, the Guptas, amongst others, to re-engineer the nation and seize national public asset ownership for themselves (Swilling et al 2017; Sundaram 2018; Myburgh 2017). The resulting shadow economy was legitimised by dishonest global accounting, public relations

and research firms like Bell Pottinger, McKinsey and Associates, Bain, and KMPG. This vast international criminal conspiracy had totally bankrupted the state by 2016 under the conniving eye of the Zuma presidency. These issues were reported by sections of what is known as the 'mainstream press', but to no avail, questioning the oft-claimed 'power of the media' hypothesis (see Radebe 2020). Sections of the media reported, called for action, but were themselves powerless to change the course of events. They did have the power and resources to check the accuracy of the propaganda they were being fed, but the *Sunday Times* failed to do so, and so became the unwitting agents of fractions of then ascendant corrupt capital and their associated political elites. This appalling state of affairs, where legitimate companies linked with the new corporate gangsters with regard to the part played by Bell Pottinger, was explained, improbably, as a failure of ethics (Verwey and Muir 2019). Similarly, as the successor KMPG Chair candidly put it, his company's relationship with the Guptas was an inexcusable failure of risk management, with an associated total breakdown of all controls (*Sunday Times Business Times*, 4 October 2020, p. 6; Nkhula 2020). Yet, this belated admission barely scratches the surface that '… obscures the existence of a political project at work to repurpose state institutions to suit a constellation of rent-seeking networks that have been constructed and now span the symbiotic relationship between the constitutional and shadow state' (Swilling *et al* 2017).

Journalists have been at the forefront of authoring many books exposing state capture, corruption, and related topics (see, e.g., Pauw, 2017; Basson 2017; Basson and Du Toit 2017; Myburgh 2017, 2019; van Rensburg 2020). Added to these books have been a slew of both print and web newspapers and magazines like the *Mail & Guardian*, *The Daily Maverick* (including the launch in October 2020 of *Maverick168*), *Noseweek*, *Ground Up*, and many others. They have led the way in such exposés, while the academic sector has engaged in the usual birds-eye theoretically-led normative studies of media as institutions and their associated social practices (Wasserman 2018; Jacobs 2019; Radebe 2020). Such studies, as valuable as they are, are short on analysis of shadow-state corruption, and tend to elide the nitty-grittyness of investigative journalism. Theory tends to mute the personalities and textured examples on which the much more grounded and traumatised journalists cut their teeth. The former are explanatory and evidentiary based, while the journalism is decriptive and fact-based, with revealing impressions drawn. But, as Harber reveals, when facts are squandered or denied, as occured with the *Sunday Times* reports over 30 stories, not only are indviduals harmed, but so are entire societies. The power by corrupt elites to play the media is greater than is the power of the media to play the elites. That is one conclusion of Harber's study.

De-colonisation

Our students know who the international theoretical gurus are, whom they often cite at length, all the while invoking 'de-colonising' rhetoric read through these oft cited northern scholars. But they are less familiar with real world journalists and their day-to-day struggles in protecting the nation from new forms of colonisation, known as Guptarisation and state capture. Many South African academic authors operate in a contemporary global arena that mixes and matches local examples into international theory. The task, however, is to recontextualise these

writings in terms of local debates and positions. Imported social theory can be also conceptually colonising unless tactically reconstituted into different historical contexts, periodisations, social formations, relations and modes of production and experiences of post-coloniality (see, e.g., Teer-Tomaselli and McCracken 2018). Unproblematised genuflection to overseas sources ignores the home grown dialectical debates on decolonising curricula that have occurred within the South African academic community. Can knowledge and practice really be decolonised by excluding the local scholars (other than Steve Biko) who have written on these topics while citing the usual external suspects (Spivak, Žižek, Foucault etc.) who are or were operating under totally different conditions, within different social formations, during specific historical periods? The theoretical sources of many books claiming to be debating de-colonisation are almost entirely of North-Atlantic origination. My own discipline, cultural studies, tends to be complicit in this style of writing that slides along engagingly expressive turns of phrase unencumbered by the space-consuming requirement of historical contextualization, reliance on evidence and detailed cross-referencing.

To the books

My objective here is a critical assessment of the work of a number of former journalists who relocated to the academic sector. They have bridged the different expressive styles, offering description and explanation with texture. In the case of Gawie Botma and Lizette Rabe, three-and-a-half centuries of meticulous media history informs compelling contemporary analysis. They have brought the pioneering early media and politician personalities to life. These are the actors who make history under conditions not of their own making, to paraphrase Marx. After discussing *Race Talk* (Botma) and *a Luta continua* (Rabe) followed by the Herman Wasserman and Sean Jacobs' books, I will then examine Glenda Daniel's *Power Loss*, an exquistely written textbook that, unlike the aforegoing, is somewhat shorter on history and looser in cross referencing, though very detailed on informative end noting. My analysis concludes with Harber's exposé of the *Sunday Times's* unwitting co-optation into aspects of the state capture project. The irony is that story was broken by the smallest, least capitalised media, that outperformed the largest and most well resourced.

An objective is to asess styles of writing and of approaches to writing history that address the discourses of the contemporary moment.

Race Talk

In assesing other manuscripts for international publishers on South African media and film topics I have become increasingly concerned at the lack of reading by these international scholars of the Afrikaans academic literature and locally published case studies on the one hand. On the hand, is the imbibing of easy rhetorical English-language explanations that are often based on unsupported supposition repeated through time to eventially become 'truth'. One such myth is that TV came late to South Africa thanks to suspicion of the medium by then Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, Albert Hertzog. Hertzog's endlessly repeated culturally-based archane objection was but one minor factor, as revealed by Ruth Teer-Tomaselli who emphasies cost and technological considerations as more compelling reasons (2019). Botma and Rabe thankfully

break with this kind of unscientific and exclusionary rhetorical strategy profered as fact by going directly to original Afrikaner sources and making them available to English speakers.

Race Talk and *A Luta continua* (on the history of media freedom) are based on meticulous archival research presented in a new, fresh and highly engaging way. Both authors teach journalism at Stellenbosch University and their expressive flair shines through every sentence. While their works are intensively cross-referenced, a *sina qua non* of academic writing, the noting never intrudes into the flow of their respective narratives. They have thus recovered one of the functions of referencing: that is to point readers to the wider repertoire on the topic and to comprehensively map the field under discussion. Their referencing system eliminates the more turgid academic style where authors tend to fixate on over-referencing the named academic gurus who then become the focus for the writer, thereby sometimes making the prose difficult to read. But certainly, the journalists and editors should be named and lauded, as they are in the front lines and have paid the price in loss of employment, health and security. Similarly, and where appropriate, those, along with their owners, who failed to adhere to professional principles, and who manipulated the media for sectarian gain should be named and shamed, which is the Harber technique.

Botma accepts that South Africa's problems started with Jan van Riebeeck in 1652, but that something else also "began" with him: the country's modern media history. In contemporary terms, Van Riebeeck can be described as an avid "blogger", suggests Botma. This quirky historicisation permeates Botma's analysis as a whole, thus making 'history' relevant for contemporary readers who may have been subject to, and distracted by, anti-history, including increasingly anti-colonial, anti-settler and anti-Van Riebeeck admonishments. These kinds of contempory discourses have flattened and vitiated nuance from always complex and contending historical narratives. Unpacking these discourses is the objective of Botma's examination of historical and contemporary articulations of 'race talk' – sourced by the author back to the mid-1600s.

Race Talk navigates the following topics: Dutch colonial race talk; Race talk in the white colonial press during British rule; Race talk in the black press during colonialism and apartheid; Black Consciousness and race talk in the mainstream media; Race talk in the Afrikaans press during apartheid; Race talk in the English and alternative press during apartheid; The law and race talk in the media; Race talk and winds of change in the media ; Race talk in the digital media age; and Academic race talk in the media.

For a society still fixated on race, Botma reveals that this preoccupation was not always so. He enables the meanings to emerge from their specific everyday historical usage and periodised linguistic contexts in an organic kind of way that traces changes, shifts, and re-articulations when they move from being positive to pejorative. Racial epithets shift from being initially descriptive and definitive; only to become derogatory and defamatory in later generations. The textual unfolding of terms like race and its associations transports the reader through the discursive history in a quite revealing and arresting telling.

Unlike so many turgid scholarly works that are difficult to read because they are written in restricted codes meant only for other academics, Botma's story (in common with all the books

cited here) is wonderfully lucid. Academics should be talking not only to themselves but also to policy makers, students, professionals and practitioners and the generally interested. Similarly, Wynand Harmse's (2018) print-on-demand compendium addresses the practitioners, from his point of view as an ex-SABC executive. This is a personal navigation of broadcasting history and policy read through Harmse's own reminiscences. Harmse, in the process, very usefully assembles a vast swathe of primary material, documents and information under a single cover, offering his opinions and observations along the way. The presentation of the compendium however, is sometimes visually confusing in the way that the book has been designed, and it is written without engaging (except in a few instances) the academic studies of the time. No matter, this is the definitive empirically-led document that is useful to all broadcast history students wanting to engage in empirically-based secondary analysis.

Where Harmse discusses race and apartheid atheoretically, *Race Talk* is keenly aware of epistemological issues, and implictly challanges the increasingly hardening populist binery race arguments of whites versus blacks. It also fractures the reductive contemporary populist Fanonesque-derived epithets that assume intractable homogeneities as historically characterising 'race' conflict. Botma reveals conceptual cracks, ideological contradictions, political contestations, differences, changing alliances and shifting allegiances, indicated in lexical changes in language over time. He up-ends race-talking taken-for-granteds, offering an evidentiary history that questions smothering contemporary political slogans.

Botma's narrative invited me to think about how the author positions himself as writer/researcher/raced. However, tantalisingly, he situates himself only briefly. In contrast, Rajesh Sundaram's (2018) comparatively thin diary of events narrated in first person novella style reveals how he was illegally headhunted to launch the Gupta-financed television station, ANN7, that squatted on DSTV between 2013 and 2017. Lured with promises of mentoring young black broadasters and migrant Indian workers (the latter were recruited by the Guptas in contravention of visa and employment legislation), he reveals how editorial staff were subjected to "indentured labour" practices by the Guptas with the connivance of the Presidency. Sundaram's exposé describes how the amateurish channel was to be positioned "to loot state coffers of millions in advertising funding", and how he found himself "caught in a web of lies, deceipt and political thuggary" (back cover). Harber, too, writes himself into his own narrative, offering comment on those with whom he and his sources interacted. This kind of self-reflexivity is important in analysis and all too often is eliminated by instrumentalist applications of positivist 'scientific method' that assumes objectivity as a value that must be imposed even if it is unattainable, and in the cases discussed here, inappropriate. Botma clearly has a highly problematised relationship with Dutch/Afrikaner history which adds to the depth and nuance of his analysis as a whole. In contrast, Sundaram's unhappy immigrant experience in South Africa was short-lived and his narrative is much more matter-of-fact.

Botma applies an inductive method. His analysis largely moves from the particular to the general. The final chapter is where the various conceptual and theoretical strands that emerge from the nitty gritty archival work are brilliantly and accessibly stitched togeher into a broader

theoretically-based argument of wider significance that draws on some South African race literature.

Apartheid and White Supremacy

Since Botma's book is about 'race talk', it, along with others that beguilingly invoke discourses such as 'white supremacy', should rather engage this undialetical term that peppers many comparative analyses between America and South Africa. 'White supremacy' is a primarily American phrase that largely emerged from a totally different political economy during the same historical conjuncture (see Berlet and Sunshine 2019). It bears little relation to formal geo-linguistic apartheid, except perhaps in its effects on race relations and prejudical treatment of the descendents of slaves in the USA and on South Africans of colour. By way of comparison. apartheid was a structurally oppressive race-space-language arrangement formally imposed by law and geographically mapped onto a particuar territory inherited from Union in 1910. White supremacy in the USA, rabidly re-emergent under President Trump, was an attitude that was not systematically accompanied by formal national language, spatial, infrastructural and educational planning that allocated specific areas to specific 'tribal' and ethnic groups in relation to 'border industries' or spatial economic and urban planning. The term was during the 1990s introduced to South Africa by some academics looking for an emotive word to make a rhetorical point. Similarly 'white minority regime' is an evocative import that was not entertained by the National Party as, unlike as in Rhodesia that was one state, South Africa was to become 10 independent states, each managed by their own 'population group' supposedly free of central white control. The use of such terms, also like 'white monopoly capital', devised by the Bell Pottinger PR team to justify the takeover of the Presidency by the expatriot Gupa family, while theoretically unhelpful, are valorised though populist political mobilising.

The Struggle Continues

As with *Race Talk in the South African Media*, definitely as a companion, *A Luta Continua: A history of media freedom in South Africa* by Lizette Rabe is equally engaging, well-written, flowing and informative. It starts with a close examination of the swashbuckling early press era, especially when newspapers popped up here, there and everywhere, a few of which have actually survived to this day. It similarly revisits early South African media history, even pre-history, in a similarly accessible way, such that it not only opens intriguing windows on the past, but it speaks to us in the present, and takes readers into the future. That future is messy, confused, and contested. Plots and sub-plots break out here, there and everywhere, making a Robert Ludlum thriller look relatively tame and much more narratively coherent.

The main sections that comprise Rabe's book are: Colonialism's terra incognita; The unfreedoms of white unionism and white nationalism; and the new democracy dawns. Rabe's tome is coterminous with the flood of scores of excellent exposés on other sectors of the economy, polity, security, state capture, corruption, Sanral, tax evasion, and media (see also, e.g., Olver 2017; Styan 2018; Styan an Vecchiattio 2019; Ardé 2020; Duvenhage and Serrao 2015). However, *A Luta Continua* starts four centuries ago and tracks the topic from then on. The plot,

the story, and the processes uncovered start slowly, and build in momentum through the centuries during the slower analogue age.

The story's impetus begins to increase with the change of government in the mid-1990s, coterminous with the onset of the digital age, the Internet and the meshing of new and the legacy media legislative regimes. When discussing the Zuma years the pace changes frenetically, and the obviously and not unusual bumpy historical linear ride until then becomes a roller coaster nightmare without safety harnesses, fracturing this way and that. Continuous state-led threats, in concert with vindictive trolls and the disruptive effects of the Economic Freedom Fighters against the media, come so thick and so alarmingly fast, from all fronts, all the time, that the reader becomes quite dizzy during the latter third of the book.

Rabe reminds us of what has been, what could have been, and what the consequences are going to be. The author has very skillfully consolidated a myriad different strands, incidents, events, debates, policies and resistances, into a single, coherent, comprehensive, connecting and utterly compelling narrative. What started out centuries ago as reasonable calm in the always difficult and very slow negotiation of press freedom, including access to a physical printing press, becomes by the end of the book in the onset of supposed liberation, an uncontrollable tsunami of state deceit, fractional deception and attempted destruction of press and media freedom. This is the common thread in all of the books reviewed here.

Rabe's framework is momentarily grounded in Siebert et al.'s (1956) germinal *Four Theories of the Press* benchmark. This reference reminds contemporary readers unfamiliar with early media theories and their significance that much of the current struggle for freedom of speech arises out of these early philosophical discussions about the ways in which different political systems shaped speech and reporting a century ago. This explanation is implicit throughout the entire book, political issues having been prominent since the arrival of the first printing press to the Cape. Since discourses (i.e. signs) conceal their histories, and in a media-saturated world where everything seems to occur in the perceptual present, we do need to be reminded from whence free speech impulses arose, who fought for them under what conditions with what intentions, in relation to contemporary organisations that try to protect the public sphere. Crucial to this task are the Freedom of Expression Institute, the South African National Editors' Forum, Media Monitoring Africa, SOS – Save our Broadcasting and Right 2 Know.

Rabe's style of writing, like Botma's, takes the reader into the specific and now arcane phrases, expressions and words of the different periods of history. These authors, as does Harber, transport readers into the nuances, textures and feelings of the different periods, humanising their utterers notwithstanding their personal flaws and, what today in a period of intractable racial hardening and monological prescriptions on history, would be seen as unforgivable ideological transgressions. We are all subjects of our times, while some of the historical characters struggling for a free press discussed were ahead of their times. The narrative paints what cultural studies describes as 'structures of feeling', creating for me - a reader (and contemporary participant) - a complex and besieged sense of 'being there – no matter the historical period being described.

Lizette Rabe's characters are not just the 'bad guys' (settlers) of history; they are creating it, they are shaping it and they are embedding the resulting impulses for centuries to come. History explains to us why we do what we do today. The insightful nuggets that these journalists wrote about during their times were often sophisticated, perceptive and futurist. One example is: "All these "spirited itinerant newspapermen" with their small presses "wove South Africa into a country", spinning "a net of mutual awareness over the thinly populated expanse of the land and welded loose collections of individuals into communities." (p.133). The struggles initiated by Fairburn, Greig and Pringle were still playing out more than four centuries later.

Rabe provides the texture and content to the structuralist explanations offered by Tomaselli *et al* (e.g., 1987) in their early anthologies, works partly written in a social humanist historical vein, rooted in political economy. These books were explanatory of structure, determination, social processes, and of the relation between domination and resistance. However, the characters that created that history were often portrayed by this framework as mere bit players maneuvering through conditions not always of their own making. What Rabe brings to the party, and entertainingly highlights, are the personalities, the characters, and the players, who both created the determining structures and those who maneuvered within them in supporting or subverting them. Hers is not the great man theory of history, but rather a descriptive-humanist narrative that acknowledges the very individuals who inhabited the structures, providing thereby new layers of personal detail, of idiosyncratic texture and of internal contradictions and conflicts they were negotiating. No-one was (or is) in total control all the time, or at any time, thus questioning the over-determined structuralist histories that too easily divide historical processes into clear patterns of domination and resistance or the primary contradiction between capital and labour. Life is always much more messy and murky.

Foeta Krige's *SABC 8* (2019), and the book on Independent Newspapers exposing Iqbal Survé shenanigans, authored by Alide Dasnois and Chris Whitfield (2019), were insiders to the beguilingly named 'transformation' processes they were writing about. Newsrooms across the nation were sundered by suspicion, interfering managements and narcissistic CEOs. Krige tells the harrowing story of how the SABC 8, eight broadcast journalists stood up to censorship and the reign of terror unleashed by the then Chief Operating Officer, Hlaudi Motseneng. One of the 8, Suna Venter, was particularly harassed, terrorized, followed, threatened, and her car sabotaged. She died of premature death caused by the resulting stress. These books coalesce in a unified quilt of historical and contemporary explanation. What is of interest is that no media theories can explain what these journalists experienced or what they had to negotiate to do their jobs and just survive day-to-day. Explanation is more likely found in political economy, criminology and sociology, and psychoanalysis than in media theory.

One of my key takeaways on reading the Rabe, Krige and Dasnois and Whitfield stories is that these chilling – but often inspiring - studies alert one to just how immunized many of us may have become with regard to attacks on media freedom and on individual journalists. The digital age has brought more than just constant state surveillance and repression – indeed, we are all now persons of interest – often subject to anonymous trolling, death threats, professional stalking, sexist labelling and shaming of female journalists just trying to do their jobs. Physical harassment and rage, and of course assassination and imprisonment of journalists (in some other

parts of the world), have become routine. The story told so graphically by all these authors reminds us that journalists are people too, that they are paying the price in health, fear, unemployment and anxiety, in contributing to the of the fourth estate. *The SABC 8* was the most traumatizing book that I have read for long time. Rabe's narrative follows in its footsteps, though with a broader sweep. *SABC 8* and *Paper Tiger* offer the particular, while *A Luta continua* is the general with very specific examples.

Studies on South African media are best characterized by insiders writing highly textured and nuanced studies on the one hand, while on the other the more distanced and pithy styles of international authors drawing on media theories often lack systematic local immersion – and therefore an appreciation of experiential detail. The result – with regard to the latter – tends to be simplistic, formulaic and lacking in 'Southern' explanation. That is, the studies are narrated by outsiders looking in, writing for readers located elsewhere.

Bridging Analytical Styles

In bridging the two writing styles – journalism and analytical - and the local and the global – Wasserman sensitively mines studies that precede his own work, retaining the complexity, and adding new data, including from interviews with journalists. The resulting narrative speaks from the conditions of the time; he is sensitive to the changing social formation, and navigates the threats and opportunities affecting media that emerged. Overlaid on his newspaper focus is general media analysis, with discussions on 'de-Westernization' and 'de-colonization', thus interweaving his explanations from the particular (the events) to the general (internationalization) and from the general (theory) back to the particular (the local, the case study). His explanations of the local are skeptical of the easy explanatory route that claims South African exceptionalism.

Not an explicit political economy, Wasserman sweeps up numerous issues through its wide-ranging essays: transitology, ethics, media freedom, professionalism, ubuntu (communitarianism), African culture and values, and the massive post-apartheid growth of tabloids amongst new entry black readers. But even here this counter-trend is explained in terms of underlying factors and not as uncontestedly exceptional. He takes the prior story of the 1990 national media into the globalizing present, offering a wide-ranging one-stop reference. The book does not offer specific and detailed case studies, but draws on those that have been conducted by other scholars to debate bigger questions that are arising across the world.

Recovering Baseline Studies

Like Wasserman, Sean Jacobs (2019) provides a panoptic view of the South African media and how in its broadest sense such media negotiated, shaped and debated the political transition. His sense of academic history is keen, as he starts in the first two chapters with discussion of the multiracial television advertisements flighted on SABC-TV for Castle Lager that anticipated – and/or pushed – for impending social change after 1976. Contemporaneously, new kinds of socially-referenced sitcoms, soap operas and the forging of a national identity through appealing

to the notion of the "aspirational viewer", are argued to contextualize these shifts. These were driven by the emergence of black urban class-mobile consumers, identified by the international advertising agency, J Walter Thompson, a firm that responded to the conditions that were developing from the smoky aftermath of Soweto '76.

Jacobs evokes national allegories that decentre media as the direct focus, while examining broader issues read through the media in general. Alex Holt's (2011) analysis of advertising practices and new consumption patterns brought about by the growing black urbanization, and the need for single advertising campaigns aimed at identifying new and growing multiracial class-based markets that no longer responded to 'separate' messages, underpin Jacobs's analysis. The idea of 'nation' thus emerged from the advertising industry as their most effective marketing strategy. The strength of the chapter, Branding South Africa in Prime Time, is that it extends Holt's until now neglected but visually and sonically rich approach in constructing a narrative on South African emergent national branding. Allied to these advertising messages, was their multi-racialisation of characters and the notable Castle's anthemic unifier.

The chapter on the Second Afrikaner State in Cyberspace examines the interrelationship between media and the formation of new Afrikaner identities, "increasingly formed at the intersection of global identity politics and symbolic relationships between political activists and online media" (p. 139). This is a highly nuanced discussion on the topic relating to Afrikaner negotiations of identity, nation and position during the post-apartheid era, in its contradictions, contestations and ideological reformulations. Cyberspace has created the conditions for a virtual Afrikaner nation-in-waiting managed by mainly right wing activists, a few well-known musicians and academics looking to preserve their minority rights in a globalising world.

Who belongs and who does not, and how this is mediated by both media and politicians, is the subject of the Conclusion. Xenophobia is one result. Colonially-derived indirect 'tribal' rule by chiefs over their rural minions is another, a residual political arrangement that cautions claims of 'liberation': "Thus the past lives on in the postcolony" (Jacobs 2019: 174).

Jacobs's conducted extensive interviews, and he draws on just some of many published actual case studies done by other authors. Through such contextually rich and nuanced cross-referenced work he connects the dots for his more general readers, deploying extensive endnotes very effectively in doing so. The refreshing reimagining by Jacobs of shifts by corporations and the state has resulted in his canny identification a new kind of citizenship as consumption, an extension of Holt's early theory.

The next book under discussion uses theory differently to all of the above.

Power Loss

Glenda Daniel's *Power and Loss* embraces four simultaneous objectives: a) an analysis of contemporary media issues enables the author to b) pursue a personal approach via an accessible social theory framework. c) She explains her own and others' newsroom experiences

in relation to studies conducted by University of Witwatersrand (Wits) journalism students; and d) she popularises otherwise complicated social theory to frame her arguments and descriptions.

Like with the Botma, Harber and Rabe books, *Power and Loss* is lucidly written, engaging, racy and spell-binding. Again, a journalist's flair is at work in making complicated issues clear headed. The narrative connects events, politics, people and places, largely against a background for those already in the know. This book shares with Krige and Dasnois and Whitfield the character of an exposé, a call to holding miscreants to account by sketching the background noise to contemporary incidents. *Power and Loss* is a dynamic illustrated introduction to the mess and confusion that confronts today's journalism students. Daniels is trying to show how to use social theory and concepts in making sense of what happens. Her almost casual hailing of theorists and their complicated concepts and integration into accessible explanations could be argued to be one way of showing students how otherwise opaque theory helps us to make sense of everyday situations, examples and events.

Very often, engagingly designed books like *Power and Loss* are rejected by our peers as 'not scholarly', as they include photographs, graphics, boxes and bullet points. Such work is denied 'accreditation' by university and Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) committees. This is to confuse content with form. The Daniels text is laid out with an eye to encouraging student readers, to drawing them in, and lengthening their attention spans. A good graphic designer can easily bring about an integration of visual and content coherence, as is done here. In the process students can find through browsing (as they might the Internet) of the book's pages what they are looking for, and the design will complement the somewhat racy author expression as part of its consumer attraction. That's the upside. That it 'looks like' a textbook is a red rag to publication committees and DHET that see regrettably little value in the principle of lucidity, or the value of textbooks, or the importance of practice-led research (see Frahm-Arp 2020). For me, however, this form of gatekeeping is not an issue as it is the work and the readers that are of importance, not whether the book looks 'scholarly' and thus qualifies for DHET publication incentive subsidy.

Current research is always embedded in prior research, and is intensively cross-referenced. Unlike Rabe, Botma, Wasserman and Jacobs, few references are provided by Daniels (or by Harber) to the key histories on the South African media, newspapers, newsroom practices and media policies. In other words, 'the question of how did we get here' (from the analogue past to the post millennium digital present), is left largely unanswered.

This very compelling narrative and the gut-wrenching extensive interviews with so many alienated media professionals, the work relies on data generated by some empirical surveys and extensive open-ended interviews, which add texture, knitted together by short pockets of theorized summing up, usually at the ends of chapters.

Many of the issues raised by Daniel's interviewees were also on the agenda during the late 1980s and 1990s. The idea that the 'mainstream' press should be taxed to subsidize the community press was a major and very acrimonious debate. Eric Louw's edited anthology, *Media Policies in*

South Africa: Debates of the 1990s (1993) in which this conflict is highlighted, is the benchmark book for assessing the contemporary situation. Cross-referencing with the academic literature to reveal the interconnections between workplace experiences and how academics explained them both historically and now is always helpful. There have also been some earlier studies on gender issues and workplaces, prior to the social media era - both in conjunction or in cooperation with the South African National editor's Forum, though they used different methods and asked different questions at different times, squandering the opportunity for methodological continuity. With regard to Caxton, a UNESCO-sponsored study, the first of its kind, done by Farhana Goga (2000) lacks any submission from Caxton's which boycotted the project in contrast to every other news firm. In contrast, for Daniels's study, someone from Caxton's was interviewed by the Wits students. In the process the Caxton's official stepped innocently into the cross-subsidization issue mentioned above. This is what I mean by cross-referencing. Something of historical significance would have been loosened in the process. What brought Caxton's to the party this time?

Who is Capturing Whom? **A Very Sad Saga**

Harber's focus is on when good journalists go bad, when editors lose their judgement, and when owners misuse their institutional power. It is about what happens when the victims of appalling journalism lose their jobs, their reputations and their human rights. Interspersed with his unravelling of how good men and women are set up by opportunistic reporting are Harber's salutary comments about how professional journalism practices, codes of conduct and cautionary gatekeeping were thrown to the wind with regard to over 30 stories appearing in the *Sunday Times*, though he concentrates on just a few recent instances. The whole society thereby became victims as the paper became the cauldron though which different corrupt fractions of the state washed their crimes, setting up people and destroying the tax investigative unit, the Cato Manor police unit and wrecking recently hard-won public institutions. This is a similar narrative as those discussed above, laced with comments about personalities, their motivations and their behaviour. One gets to know those who were grievously wronged and how they fought back against the paper that enabled KGB-style disinformation campaigns against honest policemen and tax investigators; and at the time of writing this article and the release of the book, how those corrupt state officials who wrecked the careers of the honest are now increasingly the ones in the dock, and even in jail. Should some of the *Sunday Times* journalists be in the dock with them? Harber's book partly facilitated a tale of redemption for some of those involved.

This is not a story about media power, or how owners imposed dominant narratives, but it is about how compromised journalistic practices aided and abetted large-scale criminality and enabled corrupt politicians. Such practices do not necessary indicate fraudulent ownership (see pp. 187ff.) Top heavy management, too few reporters, multiple rewriting by layers of editors, splash headlining, mischievous removal of scare quotes that affixes fact to what is otherwise just a vague supposition, and the *Sunday Times's* investigation unit's arrogance that arose from the paper's undoubted successes, are all blameworthy (p. 189).

The book also reveals the merits of good investigative journalism, a skeptical reading, painstaking study of documents, working with, and protecting, anonymous sources, ordinary people who stumble inadvertently across breathtaking items of information, as occurred with regard to the Gupta-leaks. Fascinating is how two Gupta employees found discarded malfunctioning hard drives, fixed them, and began to realise the bombshell in their hands. Then, they had to find someone who would appreciate and work with what they had to the public benefit. And, thereby hangs another tale as parties to the initial discussions leaked information to other people who fed it onto the *Sunday Times* that infuriatingly scooped amaBhungane's *(amaB)* who were the first group of investigative journalists to be shown the 100 000+ emails.

Harber also tells his story with extensive supporting notes, but by page without note numbers. This inclusion is an important statement given the *Sunday Times's* own failure to detect disinformation or look for corroborating facts and information to support its fictions. He puts a face on John Hartley's provocative challenge during his keynote address at an Australian communication conference in 1994 that academics always cite their sources but that journalists rarely do so.

There are few references to theory in the book: no psychanalytic explanations are offered of why the *Sunday Times* staff who are characters in the story behaved as they did. The motivations of the journalists would seem to be rooted in individual flaws, failing relationships, personal foibles, institutional newsroom laxity, dissension and arrogance. No doubt this is the case, but we are all subjects of social practices; we are all functioning within ideology all the time, and there is an intrinsic interrelationship between structural determinants and individual subjectivity. One social practice implicated in poor journalism is the "rush to publish" (p. 112) in maintaining competitive advantage. Downsizing of newsroom staff, juniorisation and loss of experience, loss of advertisers, and reliance on dubious sources, were additional factors. Frenzy journalism versus slow journalism as exemplified by amaBhungane's exposé of the Gupta takeover of the state via a compliant president who delivered the machinery enabling corruption a previously unprecedented scale for, is one factor. Locating AmaB within the black and progressive presses in South Africa, Harber continues,

> *AmaB*, as the unit was often known, was the best at the slow and patient gathering of the muck of South African politics, and laying journalistic eggs in it. It had built a strong reputation for repeatedly exposing corruption and poor governance in long, complex, detailed, sometimes painfully difficult to read – but meticulous and important – pieces (Harber 2020: 131-2).

The philanthropy-sustained *amaB* is not a newspaper. It does not have the fixed overheads of the legacy industry, and neither it is a slave to deadlines. It has "the luxury of a different set of values and priorities" (Harber 2020: 166).

The takeaway for me of Harber's analysis is that sometimes theory just gets in the way. The explanation can be much more mundane. Not everything can be explained through abstraction, but of course anecdotes often are illustrative of the theory. There needs to be a balance.

Concluding Comments

History is the glue that ties analysis together via the technique of cross-referencing and end noting. The present-mindedness offered by the professional journalists under siege paints the quotidian texture that animates the academic studies that focus on historical process, explanation and structure. International theory can explain just so much, and often misleads because it cannot easily adapt to the specifics of the local, especially when the local sources are marginalised. In the same vein, the local can adapt to the international, but in each case, we must be explicitly aware of the frames of reference developed to explain the unusual, the different and the historical. State capture and cognitive capture, says Harber (2020: 311), are two sides of the same coin. The Gupta media, Independent, and SABC were subject to the former, while the *Sunday Times* was a self-serving victim of the latter. The newspaper's culpability was enabled by the willingness of its editors and investigative journalists to sustain those errors over many years, to defend the indefensible, and to mute competing narratives, "digging themselves deeper and deeper into their hole as these counternarratives grew louder and louder" (p. 312).

Most crucially, all of these books have appeared notwithstanding the instrumentalist bio-medical ethical procedures that are now strangling the kind of research undertaken by Harber and Daniels. Harber wore his non-academic hat in writing his book, "in style and substance, as a work of journalism, rather than a piece of academic research. For this reason, I follow the ethics, rules and codes of journalism. It has not been through the standard academic gatekeepers" (email, 22 October 2020). His book will not get DHET recognition, but like all the books mentioned in this review, its social value is immeasurable. As he concludes, "Do no harm, the ethicists say, but the truth is you can only try to anticipate harm and mitigate it. To risk no harm would be to do no journalism; to do no harm, a fantasy" (p. 223). Academics should take note.

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